

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

091438Z Jan 06

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 000177

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR PRM AND NEA
BAGHDAD FOR REFCOORD CAMILLE HILL
CAIRO FOR REFCOORD GERRY CHEYNE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/08/2015

TAGS: PREF PHUM IZ JO

SUBJECT: JORDANIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS IRAQIS

REF: 05 AMMAN 3963

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Most of the estimated 400,000 Iraqis living in Jordan are well-integrated. Following the November 9 Amman hotel bombings, however, the Iraqi Embassy reported several isolated physical attacks against Iraqis. Meanwhile, UN officials report an up-tick in the local detention of Iraqis. These incidents, combined with draft anti-terror legislation that would require all citizens renting properties to foreigners to report personal details about tenants to the authorities, are leading to increased Iraqi requests for assistance at UNHCR's Amman offices. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) Due to the traditionally close economic ties between Jordan and Iraq, Amman had a large Iraqi population even before Operation Iraqi Freedom (reftel). Since then, the Iraqi population in Jordan has grown steadily and is likely now somewhere around 400,000, though estimates vary widely. Iraqis still enjoy visa-free entry to Jordan. Many come here and remain after their visit permits have expired. The government announced a number of measures to tighten security after the bombings; anecdotal reports suggest that closer scrutiny of foreigners, immigration status may be an unannounced element of these security measures.

Alleged Assaults on Iraqis

¶3. (C) In the days following the November 9 bombings of three Amman hotels, there were rumors that Iraqis had been beaten in several spontaneous reactions to the bombings. Iraqi Embassy Counselor Hanna Murad told Poloff that the Iraqi embassy in Amman had received numerous complaints from Iraqi citizens living in Jordan. Murad said the most serious incident involved an Iraqi student attending Jordan University who was beaten by several Jordanians after media announced that the suicide bombers were Iraqis. According to Murad, the student reported the beating to a Jordanian police officer who offered no assistance and told the student that it was "not his job to get involved." Murad commented that media coverage of the investigations appears to have exacerbated anti-Iraqi sentiment. For example, she claimed that six GMC vehicles bearing Iraqi license plates were burned and another 18 were damaged after the media reported that Jordanian security forces were looking for GMC vehicles with Iraqi plates. COMMENT: GID officers and mid-level officials from the Foreign Ministry told us they were unaware of any reports of retaliatory attacks against Iraqis living in Jordan. END COMMENT

UPSURGE IN ARRESTS LEADS TO RUSH ON UNHCR OFFICES

¶4. (C) UNHCR's Jordan office has received no reports in the last month of physical attacks being directed against the 777 Iraqis that UNHCR has recognized as refugees in Jordan, nor the tens of thousands of additional persons who have filed asylum claims with UNHCR in Jordan since 2003. However, Acting Officer-in-Charge/Senior Protection Officer Anna-Maria Deutschlander told refcoord December 1 that her staff are struggling to respond to an upsurge in arrests and deportations. According to UNHCR, attempted deportation of Iraqis with pending refugee claims rose from an average of 20 per month to 45 cases in the month following the bombing. COMMENT: UNHCR has issued asylum seeker ID cards to 16,032 Iraqis since April 2003, when Jordan signed an agreement to provide temporary protection to persons displaced by the hostilities in Iraq pending determination of their refugee claims. According to UNHCR, most Iraqi asylum seekers who end up in detention are arrested for working illegally. END COMMENT. UNHCR believes that 15 of these individuals were deported before it could investigate their cases. UNHCR is currently conducting refugee status determinations on another 20 individuals whom they successfully bailed out of Jordanian prisons. COMMENT: UNHCR saw smaller up-ticks in arrests ahead of the World Economic Forum, and following the August rocket attacks in Aqaba. END COMMENT.

15. (C) Deutschlander believes the GOJ is continuing to respect UNHCR's refugee status determinations; her staff have been contacted by the government to re-interview three recognized refugees, who hold Ministry of Interior-issued ID cards, who have ended up in detention in the last month. However, she stressed that her office is usually contacted by family members of detained asylum seekers, and that her staff are receiving increased applications from asylum seekers who claim their asylum seeker cards have been confiscated by police during routine stops. She said "panicked crowds" of Iraqis are also "overwhelming" UNHCR's Amman offices seeking to file or renew their asylum claims because of new post-November 9 security measures. For example, the Interior Ministry is now requiring all property owners to register their foreign tenants (NOTE: not just Iraqis) with the police. Newly proposed anti-terror legislation, still in the drafting stage, may require citizens renting apartments or office space to non-Jordanians to report specific, personal details about tenants to the authorities within 48 hours of signing any lease. COMMENT: The King and Prime Minister Bakhit have, on several occasions, commented to us that any new anti-terror legislation must ensure individual freedoms and respect human rights. END COMMENT

UNCERTAIN LEGAL STATUS GROWS MURKIER

16. (SBU) Human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, are starting to express concern over this proposed legislation, which HRW has characterized as the "systematic expelling of undocumented Iraqis back to Iraq" in recent media statements. Jordan's King Abdullah has assured foreigners that no unwarranted action will be taken against them in response to the November 9 bombings. The King referred to Iraqi expatriates as "our dear brothers," who enjoy the right to "live in dignity in their second homeland," and added that "their security is our security and we will not accept that any harm should come to them." However, UNHCR Jordan staff believe that the "temporary protection regime" it negotiated with regional governments in 2003 to cover thousands of new Iraqi asylum seekers has eroded to the point where it can longer protect Iraqis from immediate deportation from Jordan. UNHCR officers from Amman, Damascus and Beirut reportedly used a pre-scheduled meeting in Lebanon last week to devise tripwires that will allow them to assess the refugee claims of asylum seekers before they end up in government detention subject to deportation. However, UNHCR is also implementing staff cuts in its regional offices that could severely limit the effectiveness of this enhanced protection system.

17. (C) COMMENT: We are unable to confirm any of these few reports of isolated attacks against Iraqis. The overwhelming majority of Jordanians continue to treat their Iraqi neighbors decently. However, some Jordanians were already starting to grumble before the bombings about Iraqis stretching social services and pricing them out of property markets in the better districts of Amman. If significant new numbers of Iraqis were to flow into Jordan, tensions could become more serious.

18. (C) Comment continued: If a more serious crackdown were in the offing, we would expect to see a visa regime imposed on Iraqis, and there have been no reports that such a step is under consideration. Jordan's status as the leading safe haven for Iraqis continues to benefit Jordan's economy significantly, and Jordanian policy makers are well aware of that.

Hale